

## ***NORWALK AND NORWALK-LIKE VIRUS***

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#### **What is Norwalk virus infection?**

Norwalk virus infection is a common cause of diarrhea and vomiting sickness in the United States. The virus was first identified during an outbreak in Norwalk, Ohio, in 1972.

#### **Who gets Norwalk virus infection?**

Any person of any age group can become infected. It occurs mainly in humans and is found in every part of the world. Recent reports suggest animals may also carry the illness, but animals have not been shown to pass the virus to humans.

#### **How is Norwalk virus spread?**

It is spread by exposure to infected people or contaminated food and water. The virus is passed in stool and vomit. Outbreaks have been caused by sick food handlers, shellfish, or contaminated water (pools, lakes, ice, etc.). It is usually spread from person-to-person by direct contact, but some medical reports suggest that the virus can spread through the air during vomiting.

#### **What are the symptoms?**

Symptoms of Norwalk virus infection include nausea, vomiting, non-bloody diarrhea, and stomach cramps. Headache and low-grade fever may also occur.

#### **How long do symptoms last?**

Persons with Norwalk virus usually recover within 2 to 3 days without serious or long-term health effects. Although the virus is easy to spread, serious illness rarely occurs.

#### **How soon after exposure do symptoms usually appear?**

Most people will begin to have symptoms within 1 to 2 days, but some people may become ill as early as 10 hours or as late as 3 days.

## **What is the treatment?**

No specific treatment is available. Persons who become dehydrated will need to drink plenty of clear fluids. Rarely, people may become sick enough to go to the hospital. There is no vaccine available and antibiotics should not be used.

## **How can Norwalk virus infection be prevented?**

The following steps may reduce the risk of getting or spreading the infection:

- wash hands thoroughly after each toilet visit and before preparing food.
- people who experience nausea, vomiting or diarrhea should not attend school or work and should not handle food for others while ill.
- avoid drinking untreated water.
- cook shellfish thoroughly before eating.

## **If I get it once, will I get it again?**

Norwalk virus infection only gives you short-term immunity. A person may get sick each time he/she comes in contact with the virus.

## **How often does it occur?**

Norwalk virus infection can occur at any time of year and is the cause of about half of the gastrointestinal illness in the United States.

## **Where can I get more information?**

- Your personal doctor
- Your local health department, listed in your telephone directory
- The Utah Department of Health, Office of Epidemiology (801) 538-6191
- The Center for Disease Control and Prevention

**UTAH DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
OFFICE OF EPIDEMIOLOGY**

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